

Scottish Borders Access Forum

Minutes of the Meeting held online on Wednesday 25th May 2022

Present:

William Davidson (Chair)
Walter Douglas (NFU)
Keith Robeson (SBC Senior Ranger)
David Langworth (Melrose Paths Group)
Simon Ovenden (Scottish Land and Estates)
Clare Sturla (Scottish Land and Estates)
Andy Pearson (Water Access)
Ed Morris (Bowhill)
Erica Niven (SBC Access Ranger)
Denise Brydon (SBC Access and Transport Assistant)
Beryl Masson (British Horse Society)

Apologies

Trevor Bryant, (Cycling)
Michael Paton, (Bowhill)

Introduction

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting especially Ed Morris who was attending to discuss access at Bowhill.

Minutes of last meeting of the Access Forum

The minutes of 25th January 2022 were accepted as a true reflection and will now be posted to the SBC website.

https://www.scotborders.gov.uk/downloads/download/378/minutes_of_local_access_forum

Matters arising

Will be dealt with as agenda items. At this point Erica Niven advised the meeting that she would be moving on within Scottish Borders Council so this will be the last meeting she will attend as Access Ranger. WD recorded thanks and appreciation from the Access Forum for all her hard work and assistance over the years.

SBC Access Rangers Update

KR presented a summary of the Access Rangers report – a copy will be circulated with these minutes. It was noted that in addition to normal maintenance, the impact of Storm Arwen continues to affect workload and we are still getting new reports of storm damage. The team continue to work with landowners and other SBC teams to clear paths. We are still encouraging the public to report issues. KR also reported

on the works done at Maxton with the landowner agreement to remove steps and replace them with a graded path by EN. The works for Hawick Flood Protection works and Bowden paths were noted. The Team is still working from home.

Other Interest Updates

Cycling

DB presented a summary of the cycling update – a copy will be circulated with these minutes. Current projects were detailed including construction of the Eddleston Water Path.

Equestrian

BM noted increasing concerns over safe access to forests for horse riders particularly in the Tweed Valley area. It was noted that BHS is keen to work with other users and stakeholders to improve shared access and manage risks. It was suggested that signage regarding shared use and behaviours could be installed at car parks and trail exits especially on public roads could be reviewed. EN noted that the BAF had previously seen the maps from FLS. Agreed this will be passed to KJ for FLS by KR and KJ would be asked to attend the next meeting of the Access Forum to review.

BM also raised the access issues at Eskdalemuir Forest and the rifle ranges – following a full discussion on this – it is also a concern at Craik and the position of the planners at Dumfries and Galloway Council was noted. It was agreed that KR and EN would follow this up with the Scottish Borders Council Planners and report back to the next meeting.

Paths to Health report

KR presented a summary of the Walk It update provided by Denise Carmichael – a copy will be circulated with these minutes. The Forum welcomed the Walk It project and noted that it continues to expand. KR recorded that the management of the expansion is impressive and credited DC with this. DC is also supporting the Walking Festival by providing training. W Davidson recorded appreciation of the Walk It programme and the work of DC ongoing.

Water Access

AP represents water access on the Forum. A full discussion on water access was held and KR reported that water access issues are increasing particularly in relation to disturbance to wildlife. There are now more water based businesses within the area and the issues are likely to increase over the summer as more people take access to water. EN offered to assist AP with an access issue on the Tweed.

Walking Festival update

Plans are underway to hold the Scottish Borders Walking Festival in Galashiels in September 2022. Kelso will host the event in 2023.

Access issues updates

As agreed at the last meeting – Ed Morris Estate Manager from Bowhill was invited to discuss the planning application for Bowhill. The full application can be viewed on the Public Access Portal link [Simple Search \(scotborders.gov.uk\)](https://www.scotborders.gov.uk) – ref 22/00372/FUL

EN noted that as the Outdoor Access Team are a statutory consultee she has submitted a response.

EM advised the BAF on the rationale and plans for the gates and charging areas – this has been reviewed with EN and the gate widths are being amended. DL passed on concerns from walkers regarding signage. SO offered to share experience and this was noted. WD noted that this is an ongoing planning application and thanked EM for attending.

KR provided an overview of current access issues.

Any Other Business

Forum Membership

This was discussed and it was agreed that issues can be raised through specific interest groups which are represented on the Forum or via the Access Team. Guests can be invited for specific issues as required with the agreement of the Forum. KR will respond to the Ramblers request.

WD noted that he has been Chair for 10 years.

Meeting format – it was agreed to send a Poll regarding the format of the meeting returning to in person or online prior to the next meeting.

Recruitment – Access Team

DL asked if a replacement Access Ranger for the West Area will be recruited and KR was pleased to confirm that the recruitment process has commenced.

EN recorded appreciation of the support from the Forum and it was noted that she will still cover some existing access issues.

Date of next meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held on Wednesday 28th September 2022 at 2pm. A hold the date invite will be issued now.